

AGENDA ITEM IV A

PROPOSED LETTER OF INTENT

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA - MONROE

M.F.A. IN CREATIVE WRITING

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Letters of Intent

Prior to the submittal of a proposal for a new academic program, a college/university must submit a Letter of Intent for assessment and approval. Letters of Intent serve two related purposes: 1) they allow the Board of Regents to decide whether campuses should continue to plan for the development of new academic programs; and 2) they serve to coordinate statewide the development of new academic programs. Letters of Intent **do not** serve as the mechanism to determine need, review curricula, assess resources, or approve a budget. These processes are accomplished during the full program proposal review.

Colleges and universities shall transmit Letters of Intent to the Commissioner of Higher Education for all new programs to be proposed, with the exception of proposed undergraduate programs below the baccalaureate level.

Procedures and timelines for Letters of Intent are as follows:

- 1. A Letter of Intent may be filed at any time.**
- 2. A separate document must be prepared for each projected program.**
- 3. Letters of Intent will be scheduled for consideration by the Board of Regents within ninety days (90) after receipt of documentation.**
- 4. A full program proposal may be submitted ninety (90) days after a Letter of Intent has been approved by the Board of Regents.**
- 5. Letters of Intent are valid for three years after approval by the Board of Regents. Upon expiration of this time period, a new Letter of Intent must be submitted.**

The following factors will be considered in assessing Letters of Intent:

- 1. The program must be within the role and scope of the institution.**
- 2. The program must not be needlessly duplicative of those at other institutions of higher education.**
- 3. The program shall be consistent with the mandates of the desegregation Settlement Agreement.**
- 4. The program shall adhere to specific criteria for funding. More specifically, the Board of Regents shall not approve planning for a new academic program unless the prospective program meets certain funding criteria. (See “Staff Analysis” section below)**

Program Description

Per this Letter of Intent, the University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM) seeks Board of Regents' approval to submit a program proposal for an online Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) degree program in Creative Writing. The University of Louisiana Board of Supervisors approved this Letter of Intent at its April 2008 meeting.

The Letter of Intent provides the following projected program description:

The Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (M.F.A.) is a terminal degree for advanced study in the writing of fiction, nonfiction and poetry, with a mix of online workshops and literary seminars. The M.F.A. prepares its graduates for careers in professional writing and in the teaching of creative writing. The M.F.A. Graduate Program includes the following activities: two years of study; a creative thesis (book length collection of creative work); completion of required coursework; and a thorough introduction to the theories and professional practices associated with creative writing. Notably, there is a substantial amount of individualized writing study. Experienced writers facilitate online writing workshops, oversee relevant personal and group tutorials, and direct independent projects and thesis preparation. With the exception of the introductory seminar, this degree will be delivered entirely online.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The Board of Regents follows established criteria in evaluating Letters of Intent, as described in the "Background" section of this agenda item. The following four issues are primary considerations:

1. The program must be within the role and scope of the institution.

According to *Role, Scope, and Mission Statements* of the Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education: 2001, ULM "will be committed to graduate education through the master's degree, offering graduate programs to meet regional or state needs." The projected program would compliment comprehensive, existing graduate offerings at the University. Staff, therefore, opines that proposed program is consistent with the stated role, scope, and mission of the University.

2. The program must not be needlessly duplicative of those at other institutions of higher education.

The University notes that there is no on-line M.F.A. in Creative Writing offered by any other public or private institution in Louisiana. Residential M.F.A. Creative Writing programs are found at McNeese State University, LSU A&M (Baton Rouge), and the University of New Orleans. No such program is available in north Louisiana. Accordingly, the staff concludes that unnecessary duplication is not a relevant issue.

3. The program shall be consistent with the mandates of the Desegregation Settlement Agreement.

As the 1994 Desegregation Settlement Agreement makes no mention of any degree in Creative Writing within its prescribed list of required new programs, desegregation issues are not a relevant concern.

4. The program shall adhere to specific criteria for funding.

Recalling acceptable financial criteria as stated in the Letter of Intent policy:

The Board of Regents shall not approve planning for a new academic program unless the prospective program meets one or more of criteria 1-5 below:

- 1. The program will be formulated through a reorganization of existing courses, requiring no additional State expenditures for at least five years (for example, new options or concentrations in existing programs).**
- 2. The program will be funded by concomitant reductions in expenditures, requiring no additional State expenditures for at least five years (for example, programs funded by the reallocation of resources from terminated or consolidated programs).**
- 3. The program will be funded entirely through non-State monies for a period of five years.**
- 4. The program will demonstrably promote economic development in the State.**
- 5. The program is deemed indispensable to fulfilling the role, scope, and mission of the university or college and is deemed indispensable to fulfilling critical educational needs of the State.**

The University claims that criteria #2 applies to this Letter of Intent. Documentation from the University states that for the first five years of the program total costs will be approximately \$85,000 which will be absorbed through budgetary reallocation and monies generated through online course fees. No additional State appropriations will be required to cover the program.

STAFF SUMMARY

The proposed program appears to be within the role, scope, and mission of the University. Program duplication appears not to be a problem, given the lack of such an online degree elsewhere in Louisiana and the lack of such a program in North Louisiana. Desegregation issues appear not be relevant in this case. Costs for this program are likely to be covered through tuition and fees associated with student enrollment in the program and reallocation of existing University appropriations.

Given these circumstances, the Staff tenders the following recommendation:

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee grant approval for the proposed Letter of Intent for the projected online Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing (CIP Code 23.0501) at the University of Louisiana - Monroe.